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AUTHOR Butler, Judy D.
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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a review of "Applied Economics," a curriculum package developed by Junior Achievement, Inc. (Colorado Springs, Colorado). The materials are used in high schools across the nation and provide students an opportunity to study economics, learn about the U.S. free enterprise system, and explore their roles as citizens, producers, and consumers. The unit contains interviews of personnel at the Tennessee Junior Achievement Office, a national program advisor, a local teacher who used the materials, and an administrator of the school where the teacher worked. In addition, the material reports on training for consultants, observing classes using the program, and perusing the materials distributed to participants. The overall evaluation of the program was positive and provided practical application and experience in textbook economics. Contains 16 references. (EH)

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ED 402 244

Curriculum Review Project

Applied Economics

Judy D. Butler

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Description of Study

During my doctoral studies, we were asked to observe and evaluate a curriculum program within our area of expertise I chose to evaluate the curriculum package entitled, *Applied Economics*, a program of Junior Achievement, Inc., (JA), of Colorado Springs, Colorado. This material is recommended for use in high schools. *Applied Economics* provides high school students, primarily in the eleventh and twelfth grades, an opportunity to study economics, learn about the American free enterprise system, and explore their roles as citizens, producers, and consumers. The course is designed for one term, 18 weeks, and has several key components that distinguish it from traditional high school economics courses.

The first component is the *Applied Economic Text and Study Guide*. The text includes fifteen chapters grouped into six units which are:

- The Basic Economic Problem and the American Economic System
- The Laws of Supply and Demand
- The Economics of the Firm
- Economic institutions
- Economic Stability
- The Global Economy

The Study Guide contains numerous exercises that supplement the text and other course components. It is consumable.

Another part of the curriculum package is the *Student Company* which is an exercise that offers students an opportunity to operate their own company. The company exercise is supported by a workbook, guide, software package, and a kit.

Because many schools now oppose, or limit, fundraising, Junior Achievement has added an alternative to the Student Company component which is the *Management and Economic Simulation Exercise (MESE)*. This is a

computer simulation that organizes a competition of two to eight "companies" of students. It is supported by a workbook and documentation for the computer.

Junior Achievement provides student booklets that outline the objectives for the course of study. Introductory letters to parents are also provided. They explain how the Junior Achievement programs work, on what principles they are founded, and they explain the role of the business consultant.

Perhaps the most importatn component of the program is the consultant. This person is a vlunteer from a sponsoring business who works with the teacher and teaches, or facilitates, one class each week. The consultant's responsibilities vary depending on her/his background and interests and the teacher's design of the course. The consultant, the Student Company, and *MESE* all emphasize the applied nature of the course. These components are designed to bring to life the content of the course covered in the text.

A perceived advantage to this program for schools is that all of the materials are purchased by the company who agrees to sponsor the school that will be using the material. The company provides classroom sets of the student texts and workbooks each year and furnishes the classrooms involved with the necessary computer equipment. And, of course, the company provides the consultant.

Procedure

In preparation for this report, I interviewed personnel at the Tennessee Junior Achievement Office, one of the national program advisors, a local teacher who uses this material, and the administrator of the school in which the teacher works. In addition, I attended the training for the consultants. I also observed classes in two schools using the program.

Upon receiving all of the materials, I perused the student book, student guide, and the teachers'/consultants' guide. I did not review the guidelines for the

Student Company, nor did I experiment with the *MESE*. However, I listened to the consultants' testimonials at their training. The consultants who have worked with the program for a long time prefer the company idea, while the newer consultants prefer the computer simulation. The teachers seemd to prefer the simulation, as well.

In addition, I searched ERIC for information about this program, only to discover that substantive data was sparse. An evaluation of the program was prepared by the Formative Evaluation Research Associated in June of 1993. Also, a review of high school economic programs was done in the December, 1992, publication of the *Journal of Economic Literature*. Other than those, the other mentions of this program, or Junior Achievement, were in articles simply listing programs that deal with the teaching of economics.

Reaction

In general, this material is as good as any in traditional textbooks. Although it is consumable, as long as a business is buying replacements each year, it is certainly cost effective for schools. They can afford to have a classroom set of textbooks, or to purchase other materials for use in the classroom with the money they save by receiving the JA materials free. Since the JA materials are consumable, they are easier to update, and this aspect causes them to be most attractive substitutes for traditional texts.

The teachers'/consultants' guide is especially well done in that it has exciting activities for the class. The cooperative learning activities are well done and the organizers that accompany them to facilitate scoring and grading are exemplary. Of special interest are the vignettes about people in business. The cameoed individuals represent a multiplicity of roles in the world of work and the

land of economics, from the academician to the hourly-waged employee. They also exemplify the diversity in our population.

The reaction of students to *Applied Economics* is positive. It is easy to read, yet comprehensive. The "real-life" stories are of special interest. The simulation game is engaging. They seem to enjoy having the businessman, or woman, in the classroom. Teachers appreciate the change of pace the consultant brings to the regularity of school. The downside, of course, is that sometimes the consultants cannot adjust to the classroom situation, nor the students, and the experience is not rewarding for the consultant, the teacher, or the students. Junior Achievement monitors this situation and the problems are minimal. Most of the consultants go beyond their basic responsibilities by getting involved in the school's extracurricular activities, by sponsoring field trips, and by providing assembly programs or additional assistance to the school.

The two studies that were located disagree on the effectiveness of this program. Walstad and Van Scyoc (1992) identified three principal reasons for schools liking this program. First, the schools save money because the sponsoring company provides the textbooks and a micro-computer at essentially no cost. Second, the program emphasizes the applied approach to economics. Third, salary incentives for local JA directors are often based on how many students are enrolled in their programs, so they aggressively recruit, train, and provide support to teachers and schools. In their study of economics textbooks, done in 1990, Walstad and Van Scyoc determined that students in the JA programs learned significantly less economics, and developed a significantly less positive attitude toward the subject than students using other economics textbooks.

On the other hand, the Seeley and Schumaker (1993) report, done for Formative Evaluation Research Associates, concluded that students involved in the JA program gained twice as much economic knowledge as measured by the Test

of Economic Literacy (authored by the National Council on Economic Education), than similar students taking various traditional economics courses during the fall term of the 1992-93 school year. The JA students gained more knowledge in each of the four learning areas measured by the test -- fundamental economics concepts, microeconomics, macroeconomics, and international economics concepts. These gains were observed in 74%, or 14 of 19, matched classrooms in the study. The attitudes of both groups of students toward business and the American economic system were somewhat positive before the course and were not changed significantly because of participation in either type of course. They further concluded that the structure of the course provides a bridge to span the gap between economic theory and practice.

Reflections From Course Readings

(The requirements of the assignment involved applying the information we had read cnad or discussed in class to the curriculum packing we studied.)

If, as Plato said, what is honored in a country will be cultivated there (Hutchins, 1953, p. 7), then this program is certainly a valid part of any high school curriculum. It thoroughly indoctrinates participants into the capitalistic system in which we live. Students are taught to revere the entrepreneur, to admire the successful businessman, and be invigorated about the prospects of entering careers in business. Based on this study this study in Tennessee, the program is used with standard and AP classes. The target audience is future business leaders.

Hutchins (1953) also quipped that "if the American people honored wisdom and goodness as they now honor power and success, the system of universal free education would be quite different from what it is today." (p.8) In his theory of adjustment, Hutchins proposed that the object of education is to fit the student into his physical, social, political, economic, and intellectual

environment with a minimum of discomfort to the society. He also suggests that what we really honor in America is material success and that the doctrine of adaptation leads to indoctrination (p.22). The model American is the successful businessman. Hutchins would not approve of the Junior Achievement curriculum. He would have disdained its emphasis and thought its goals vocational rather than intellectual.

From another point of view, Tyler would heartily approve of this program. At least the organization of it would please him. In the conclusion of his book, Tyler (1949) explains that

> curriculum planning is a continuous process, that as materials and procedures are identified, suggested improvement indicated, there is replanning, redevelopment and then reappraisal; and in this kind of continuing cycle, it is possible for the curriculum and instructional program to be continuously improved over the years. (p. 123)

Junior Achievement is following that process to the letter. Behavioral objectives are set out plainly, feedback encouraged, problems identified, and the curriculum changed and adapted. The paperback, consumable format makes revision easy.

Dewey (1916) believed in experiencing education. "Information is vitalized by its function." (p. 162) He believed in laboratories and games and he would like this curriculum because it is engaging. The JA curriculum is experiential and interactive. The computer simulation is similar to a game. If the Student Company is done, the classroom becomes a laboratory. Dewey emphasized that too often academic subjects are set against the practical subjects and they have become so abstracted from the world that children and adolescents inhabit, that these studies are no longer recognizable as being themselves forms of experience. The problem is one of restoring the subjects of study to their place in experience. Dewey might not have approved of economics being a required

portion of the curriculum, but he would have liked this approach to the teaching of it.

The structuralists would certainly like this curriculum because it gives purpose and structure to the study of economics. The reforms of the sixties set forth the importance of the community as teacher (Lazerson, 1985). They were fueled by the desire to create an "intellectual and technological elite to maintain America's competitive edge. (p. 45) The competitive edge about which Americans are most concerned today is an economic one. This program teaches not only the basics of the free enterprise system, but also addresses the international markets, as well as the economic concepts that are of interest to a multiplicity of economies around the world.

Like in the model programs described by Bruner(1960) and Lazerson (1985), the tension between excellence and equality is applicable to the *Applied Economics* program. It seems that business men and women are not eager to adopt inner-city schools, unless they are magnet schools. They, apparently, feel that their time is wasted. Furthermore, in listening to the business men and women at their training, it seems that they viewed some schools as virtual war zones and did not wish to invest their time and energy, nor their company's money, in such hopeless places. The JA program is more easily found in the elite private schools, or in public schools that are located in suburbs. The disadvantaged schools could use the attention, the materials, and the learning experience as well. There are, after all, budding entrepreneurs in those schools, too.

The critical theorists and the reconceptualists would certainly balk at this program as they would at many others that seek to indoctrinate students into the status quo of American life. They see schools as sustaining an existing order that promotes inequality and hinders freedom. Universal schooling should guarantee

everyone political economic equality. Henry Giroux (1989) wonders how we liberate school and society from the political and economic establishment. The JA program does not pose the questions of why we study these facts, learn these skills, or value capitalism over other economic systems. The goal of the program is for students to become excited about their role in the economic system in America both now and in the future. Giroux (1989) sees schools as cultural frontiers, not boot camps for the economy. This program certainly does not encourage students to seek their own "voices," but rather they are nurtured to join the many songs of the business world and learn to sing along. Pinar (1975) would not sanction the means-ends mentality of this curriculum either.

Eisner (1992) suggests that the factors that drive schools are those that are widely accepted, and as long as that is true, the reconceptualists will have a difficult time gaining support. This curriculum certainly supports the idea of schooling as being one mechanism through which we may keep our competitive edge in the world, a value held by a majority of parents, political, and educational leaders, as well. Pinar, and his colleagues, may well have many valid arguments for eliminating such conventional programs as this, but convincing the establishment that such should not be taught is, at best, unrealistic.

Eisner (1992) warns that when a curriculum ideology emphasizes the importance of a particular subject, a problem arises. When schools identify specific subjects as vital, (e.g., economics), the discipline becomes almost like a "plank" in a political platform. Disciplines reach such points of importance because students' performance in the subject has become a point of discontentment. The JA program was developed because those in the business world were convinced that what was being taught via traditional textbooks was ineffective in preparing students to participate in the economic system in America. We are on the verge of losing our competitive edge. Such concerns, according to

Eisner (1992, 1993), dictate that our schools' missions be framed in industrial terms. Students become products, rather than biological beings. Eisner (1992) continues by saying that "regardless of how powerful an ideological view may be in any individual's, or even group's, orientation to the world, it is seldom adequate to determine what the school curriculum shall be." (p. 3)

The field of economics is supported by two powerful groups -- Junior Achievement and Economics America (the National Council on Economic Education and its subsidiaries). These two organizations have on their boards the CEO's of the major companies in America, as well as a nice selection of powerful government officials. As was seen when Tennessee left out economics in its new requirements for graduation, this powerful special interest group can apply pressure quite convincingly. Economics, as well as government, targeted for elimination as required courses, were quickly reinstated.

The question was not one of what should be in the curriculum. The decision was made because of the pressures exerted by business and government leaders on the governor, the legislature, and the State Board of Education. A similar struggle has been ongoing at the national level over the content of the National Goals. When groups, such as these, exert their influence in the educational arena, compromises are inevitable (Eisner, 1992). I believe Eisner might like some of the creative ideas within this curriculum, but he would surely object to the idea of business using the school forum to advance professional agendas.

The JA program promotes the world of work; it teaches proper decorum for the workplace; it encourages organization for financial success; it promotes punctuality and following procedures; it establishes chains of command. Therefore, it champions the beliefs and values held by a large majority of the public, that which constitutes what might be called the operational ideology of

schooling. Schools teach punctuality, a world view that appears in the form of largely disconnected subjects, competition, clear-cut goals, and performance (Eisner, 1992). The JA program underwrites those quite well.

Reflection

The final, or original, questions of this course are yet to be addressed. What is knowledge? What knowledge is of most worth? What is the purpose of schooling? How does the curriculum being reviewed here fit into the answers and discussions of those questions?

We live in a country where we are overcome with information. We have all the information we could possibly want, but we may lack the knowledge we need. Dewey (1916) said that the ultimate value of knowledge is subordinate to its use in thinking. "Thinking is the accurate and deliberate instituting of connections between what is done and its consequences." (p. 151) The knowledge we need is that which allows us to achieve command of our environment. It is not something of which we are not conscious, but consists of the dispositions used to understand what happens to us, that which we use to connect ourselves and the world in which we live.

Hutchins (1953) agreed that knowledge is that which expands our ability to think and reason. To him, it is also that which exemplifies democratic principles. The ability to think and reason defines us as humans. Knowledge is something on which we can have multiple perspectives. It enables us to have multiple ways of seeing. It presents questions that have no answers. It is the essence of what is needed to face the great dilemmas of life.

Eisner (1985) set forth the premise that knowledge is not defined by any single system of thought. Acquiring it is often messy. The attainment of interpersonal knowledge is usually an informal and haphazard affair, not neatly

written into objective form. Eisner, and his colleagues, propose that there are many kinds of knowledge and all are worthy of attention.

That knowledge which is worthy of study can be constructed through experience. In the modern day, many have come to believe that knowledge is constructed, rather than something that is found or transmitted. Knowledge is only useful if it helps us solve problems, communicate, and experience our environment in multifarious ways.

Bruner (1960) put it another way. He said that the purpose of learning was more than just taking us to a new place. It should allow us to go further more easily. Schools must teach an attitude of discovery. Such a mission requires knowledge that is exciting, correct, and comprehensible. The act of learning involves the processes of acquisition, transformation, and evaluation. The curriculum ought to be built around the great issues, principles, and values that a society deems worthy of the concern of its citizens. He proposes a simple litmus test. Does having known it as a child make a person a better adult?

Bruner (1966) proposes that there are three different systems for representing reality. We know some things by knowing how to do them, e.g., ride a bicycle. A second way of knowing is through imagery, that which creates the iconic. And, there is representation by symbol, that which allows us to put thoughts into language. *Applied Economics* addresses all of these. Students learn the process of participation in the economy, they learn the background to advertising, to marketing, and to the imagery involved in selling products.

In his famous treatise, *The Aims of Education* (1929), Alfred North Whitehead declares that the essence of education is identifying that which is useful. He more adamantly advocates that we cannot divide the "seamless coat of learning" (p. 18). He supported technical education, as well as the sciences and humanities. In so doing, he suggested that every form of education should give the

pupil a technique, a science, an assortment of general ideas and aesthetic appreciation, and that each of these sides of training should be illuminated by the others (p. 75). There must always be a certain freshness in the knowledge dealt with in schooling. "Knowledge does not keep any better than fish." (p. 147)

Applied Economics does not contain any unique knowledge. It embodies a collective thinking about the concepts and practices of economics in a free enterprise system. It is self-serving. So, is it worthy of being included in our schooling? Are the concepts of capitalism, entrepreneurship, consumerism, market theory, etc., important parts of our canon?

The activities foster thinking and reasoning and facilitate teenagers gaining command of the economic environment in which they are learning to function. In fact, the exercises in this curriculum might well enlighten young people to the financial circumstances they face in adulthood, thereby enlarging the perspectives through which they will make future financial decisions. Economics certainly presents us with questions with no answers. Though predictive by nature, economics is not an exact science. Studying episodes from our past certainly presents perplexities, and paradoxes, not specific answers.

Because the activities are varied, especially those proposed through the business consultant, this curriculum explores many of the "ways of knowing" described by Eisner (1985). There are the practical, the scientific, the aesthetic, the interpersonal, the intuitive, the intellectual, as well as both practical and formal modes of knowing represented in the package. Some would even argue that there is a certain element of spiritual knowing involved in economics.

The program is certainly experiential. Problem solving is a common component of the lessons. Because situations are perceived through the different roles we play in the economic system, e.g., management, entrepreneur, consumer, worker, the environment is perceived eclectically. Those who support our young

people learning to participate intelligently in our market economy, those who are concerned about nurturing entrepreneurship, and those who are concerned about the continuation of the free enterprise system are certainly in support of this program. If a majority of those in a school community support such goals, then the JA program is one matter on which parents, teachers, students, administrators, and community members will easily agree.

Are we better adults because we have studied economics as a child? In America, in western cultures, I answer in the affirmative. This knowledge fosters our understanding of the dynamics of the world in which we live. Learning economic principles early may certainly nurture career decisions. In a capitalistic society we will all be faced with economic decisions and our personal contentment may well lie in our ability to make reasonable decisions in the economic arena. The more we can understand about the multifaceted world in which we live, the more we can experience contented lives that allow us to continue to explore and grow as human beings. One justification for schooling is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest for life. We are not better people because we have studied economics, no more than we are necessarily better people because we studied the Bible or other data. However, if, by studying the basic economic principles on which our system works, we can more easily live benevolent lives in which we contribute to the betterment of humankind, then what we studied as children does, indeed, cause us to be better adults.

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